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SUBJECT: OSCE PROGRESS REPORT ON PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION PREPARTIONS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE TREAT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On December 5, the Deputy Minister of the Interior said the GOA was making satisfactory progress on registering addresses in the country (the first step toward issuing voter ID cards), although he admitted they are behind schedule. The Deputy Minister expressed confidence that a required law for national IDs will be passed by mid-December and he explained that the company producing the IDs is already present in Albania and should be able to produce 15,000 cards per day starting in January 2009. The GOA will be conducting a publicity campaign to encourage Albanians to apply for the new IDs - however, the new IDs are not strictly required to vote in the 2009 election. End summary.

Progress on formalizing addresses  
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¶2. (SBU) On December 5, the Deputy Minister of the Interior spoke about Albania's progress in formalizing addresses throughout Albania in order to have a solid foundation for issuing new national identification cards. (NOTE: Albania is a mail carrier's worst nightmare - many streets are not named, and buildings and houses are not numbered. END NOTE). This process is behind schedule, although the Deputy Minister said that this was by the Ministry's choosing. Following OSCE's guidance, the GOA has focused on registering urban population centers to get as many addresses as possible established quickly. They so far have registered 118 out of 170 districts for the project. The remaining districts are small communities and municipalities.

New law needed for national ID cards is in progress  
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¶3. (SBU) The establishment of verifiable addresses is an important step towards a national ID card, but the GOA must also pass a civil status law that is in the works now as well. The Deputy Minister was very confident this law would be passed by December 18, saying that what the Interior Ministry "wants to do, it can do."

National ID cards set to arrive in January  
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¶4. (SBU) The company that will be producing the ID cards is already present in Albania as is the equipment that they will be using to print the cards. This new national ID card will be produced in conjunction with a new Albanian passport. The contracting company and the GOA claim that they will be able to produce 15,000 cards per day starting in January 2009. The time from applying for a card to receiving it should be less than 15 days.

Getting the word out  
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¶5. (SBU) The GOA will run a publicity campaign to encourage people to apply for the new IDs. The government will also pressure government employees as well as those on government assistance to

get the IDs early in order to avoid a last minute rush before the elections. If citizens do not have an ID before the election they will still be able to vote with a passport, although the Minister said that the initial publicity campaign would not make this clear in hopes that it would "scare" citizens into applying for the new IDs.

COMMENT

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¶6. (SBU) Although the GOA and OSCE are behind schedule, progress is being made towards a national ID system - a crucial precursor to a successful parliamentary election in June 2009. While a significant portion of the addresses in the project have been formalized, it is important to note that those remaining may be the hardest to verify.

If production of the ID cards begins in January as promised by the GOA, this would be an encouraging step for election governance and, Albanians hope, ease visa restrictions. A key step going forward will be to assure Albanian citizens that the system is in their best interest in order to get widespread usage of the new ID cards. Another potential stumbling block could be the price of the IDs - at 12 dollars per card and over fifty dollars for passports, the price could be prohibitive for poorer families, particularly in rural areas.

WITHERS